

Public Involvement

Public involvement in project development and programming activities is a key element in gaining public acceptance, which is critical to the success of any improvement program. The 1998 Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) reemphasized the necessity of public involvement. In Missouri, the approach is to specifically seek out involvement from four groups. These groups are: (1) Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), (2) Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs), (3) the general public and (4) local officials.

Public involvement for development of the state's transportation construction program begins several years before the projects actually appear in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), which is MoDOT's 5-year construction road and bridge improvement program.

MoDOT staff from around the state works with RPCs, MPOs, local officials and the general public throughout the planning process. Transportation planning consists of a series of decisions that direct the use of current and future available resources to accomplish the department's short- and long-term goals. The current transportation planning process can be summarized in the following five general steps.

1. Identify needs
2. Prioritize needs
3. Identify projects
4. Prioritize projects
5. Monitor progress

Each process is detailed below.

Identify Needs

Identifying needs is the first step in the transportation planning process. Transportation needs include the current, physical system problems and the anticipated future needs. Current problems might include a deteriorating roadway or bridge while an anticipated need could be addressing capacity on roadways near a growing industrial region. Problems with safety or travel efficiency are also identified as needs. It is important that identified needs encompass all such areas to adequately plan for state transportation. MoDOT utilizes a variety of resources to help identify Missouri's transportation needs.

The Long-Range Transportation Plan provides direction for Missouri's transportation system over the next 20 years. The plan was written in cooperation with local agencies, public officials and other representatives of Missouri's citizens and businesses. It contains information about roadway conditions, multi-modal transportation, funding and public input. The direction established by the plan gives rise to goals that can be used to identify the current system's needs.

MoDOT solicits input from cities, counties, regional planning agencies and metropolitan planning agencies regarding transportation problems. These groups are acutely aware of the transportation needs in their part of the state and are essential in communicating the needs to MoDOT.

MoDOT regularly monitors information about road and bridge conditions, automobile crashes and traffic congestion. This information helps identify concerns with system maintenance, efficiency and safety.

Due to the sheer volume of highway infrastructure, most transportation needs focus on Missouri's roads and bridges. These needs continue in the planning process as detailed below. Transportation problems that do not pertain to roadways are given to MoDOT's multimodal office for further handling. The multimodal office is composed of officials who work with other modes such as transit, rail, waterways and aviation.

Prioritize Needs

Prioritizing needs is the process of deciding which problems, from the list of identified needs, should be addressed first. This can be a difficult task given such a wide variety of needs. Not only do needs have different subject matter – safety, maintenance or economic development – they have varying time horizons. A structurally deficient bridge might be a more immediate need than the concern for meeting air quality standards in metropolitan areas. Simply being a more immediate need does not imply higher priority, however. Perhaps the deficient bridge is no longer needed and can be closed, while not meeting air quality standards could have a significant fiscal impact on future transportation projects and serious environmental consequences. These complicated decisions require a coordinated effort from many groups.

MoDOT uses many of the same resources for identifying needs to prioritize the needs. Cities, counties, regional and metropolitan planning agencies and other local officials give essential input on prioritizing needs. The priorities of one region of the state do not always match and sometimes conflict with those of another region. It is important to compare needs on a statewide scale where appropriate, making the process even more difficult. The Long-Range Transportation Plan and MoDOT's strategic and business plans provide guidance on what types of transportation problems are the top priorities for Missouri.

Identify Projects

Transportation needs given the highest priority are analyzed to determine the best solution. The best solution for a given need or set of needs is developed into a project. This is essentially a four-step process called the project-scoping process.

1. Determine the problem's root causes
2. Develop alternative solutions
3. Analyze alternative solutions
4. Choose best solution

Determining the cause of a problem is often more complicated than might be expected. For instance, a high incidence of accidents at a given intersection might be due to poor sight distances, weather conditions, signal timing, roadway geometry or even reckless driving. Identifying the primary reason or combination of reasons for the problem is key to developing effective solutions.

Once a problem is identified, the natural tendency for any problem-solver is to immediately offer *the* solution. Effective planning requires developing many possible solutions in order to capture the most efficient and effective solutions. MoDOT engineers and planners are experts at generating good solutions to transportation problems. MoDOT staff is even more effective when working with local and regional officials to generate the solutions. This process reveals issues and concerns that may not have previously been evident.

Solutions are then analyzed for feasibility, effectiveness, cost and other factors. This analysis is used to select the best solution. Some transportation problems have no feasible solution. MoDOT workers, through routine maintenance activities, solve others. The remaining solutions become projects that will be implemented in the future, depending on the amount of available funding. Often funding availability affects the chosen approach for a solution. Combining two solutions into one project might be more cost-effective than keeping the solutions separate. For instance, widening or repairing shoulders along a highway might be more cost-effective when combined with a rehabilitation project for the travel lanes. The project prioritization process complements this type of decision.

Prioritize Projects

Deciding which projects to do and when to do them is a complicated and often controversial matter. Gathering and discerning public input is crucial to realizing the full benefit of available funds for Missouri's transportation system. MoDOT relies heavily on local and regional planning agencies for this process.

MoDOT recognizes the need for a balance between taking care of the current transportation system and expanding the system to accommodate anticipated future demand. As a result, transportation funding is divided accordingly. The nature of this balance is adjusted through the level of funds in each category.

Projects geared toward taking care of the system tend to address regional needs and are managed by MoDOT district staff in coordination with local agencies and officials. Projects intended to expand the transportation system vary greatly. District staff handles those of smaller scale as well. Large projects of statewide significance, such as bridges over the Missouri or Mississippi rivers, major interstate projects and new corridor construction, are led by MoDOT general headquarters staff with district involvement.

Projects are prioritized against other projects in the same group. Larger projects of statewide significance are compared with one another. Smaller projects and those intended to take care of the existing system are compared with one another. MoDOT works with local and regional officials to determine the priority of the projects in each group.

Based on available funding, MoDOT decides how many high-priority projects for each category can be done and when they can be implemented. The projects that will receive funding over the next five years are documented in the STIP.

However, each of Missouri's seven Metropolitan Planning Organizations, located in Columbia, Joplin, Kansas City, St. Joseph, St. Louis, Jefferson City and Springfield, prepare a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) within their respective metropolitan planning areas. These TIPS are the accumulation of federally funded projects proposed by their local government members and MoDOT. MoDOT utilizes public input received throughout the year to develop its submittal for the MPO TIP. Each MPO has approved public involvement plans for their respective areas that allow for review and feedback from individual citizens, organizations, agencies and local area governments. Using public input as one of its decision factors, the MPO determines the projects in its area that will be programmed for construction. These TIPs are integrated into the STIP without modification.

Monitor Progress

Monitoring progress completes the transportation planning cycle. MoDOT constantly works to verify that implemented projects are effectively solving problems and making the best use of Missouri's transportation dollars. Many of the same resources used to identify and prioritize needs and projects are used to complete this process. MoDOT uses systems data to analyze whether a problem was solved. MoDOT also works with local and regional officials to get feedback on how well projects have solved problems and what shortcomings are being experienced. Projects that are not particularly effective at

meeting needs are analyzed to determine more appropriate solutions. This information can be used to better address future transportation needs.

Checking the results of previous work facilitates identification of new or recurring transportation problems. If a project did not fully meet a need, it can be noted as a continuing need. Working with local and regional officials to monitor progress requires further communication that will allow identification of other transportation needs.

Public Review Period

After a preliminary draft of the STIP, based on public and engineering input is developed and printed, a 30-day public review period begins. During this public review period, copies of the STIP are distributed to MoDOT districts for public access. Citizens have the opportunity to provide written comments, verbal comments or telephone comments (by calling 1-888-ASKMODOT) to district representatives during this period. The STIP is also available on MoDOT's web site at <http://www.modot.org>. Input from this part of the process will be used to measure the effectiveness of the STIP, to evaluate its production process and to begin making improvements on next year's STIP. The STIP becomes effective when approved by the Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission.

STIP Amendments

Projects can be amended to the STIP and to a metropolitan area T. The public involvement process for STIP amendments will occur prior to incorporating the project in the STIP. Public involvement on projects inside a MPO area will be done by the MPO according to its approved TIP amendment process.

For amended out-state project(s) that are considered to be major transportation corridor investments, a 30-day public review period will be provided. During this public review period, copies of the document defining the project(s) will be distributed to the affected district(s). Citizens will have the opportunity to telephone or write comments to district representatives during this period. MoDOT's Public Information and Outreach unit is responsible for notification and education of this review process. Notification should begin a minimum of 15 days prior to the public-review period.

Comments for out-state project(s) that are not considered major transportation investments are solicited from the affected governing bodies including counties and/or cities. After concurrence by all affected parties, the project(s) are amended quarterly into the STIP.